From The Polynesian, vol.XVII, no.36 (1860-1861).

THE POLYNESIAN

LECTURES ON MICRONESIA

By

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Lecture V

The Gilbert Islands

The history of discovery in this archipelago is briefly, and sufficiently for our present purpose, given in a paragraph by Findlay in his Directory of the Pacific Ocean: "The first island discovered was the easternmost, Byron Island, so named from the commander, who saw it June 3, 1765. The next were the northern groups discovered by the ships Scarborough and Charlotte, commanded by Capts, Marshall and Gilbert. There is a loose account of this discovery given in Governor Philip's voyage in 1788. The next authority in order is a chart contained in Dairymple's Collection, drawn by Roger Simpson and George Bass, officers of the Nautilus, under Capt. Bishop, (in 1799) In the Table of Positions, by John Purdy, is an account of some of the islands seen by the brig Elizabeth about 1809. In 1824 Capt. Duperrey visited and explored many of them; but by far the most complete account of them is given in the account of the United States Exploring Expedition" (1841).

It was Krusenstern who gave the name of Gilbert to this large group, and who subdivided it into the three groups of Scarborough, Simpson and Kingsmill, the last name including Drummond's Island and all to the South of it, then very uncertainly known. In Commodore Wilkes' Narrative the name Kingsmill was improperly extended to the whole group, and since then this has been its usual designation by Americans and American authorities.

This group consists of fifteen, or perhaps more properly sixteen, low, coral islands, only two of which are destitute of a lagoon. It was the ten most northern islands that were explored both by Duperrcy, and Capt. Hudson, of the United States Exploring Expedition; yet the remaining islands to the South are now scarcely less known, even geographically, from their waters having been the resort of sperm whales, and, consequently extensively visited during the last twenty years by the captors of the whale; and our knowledge of the whole group has greatly increased. Since the visit of the United States Exploring Expedition those islands have grown into some importance to the civilized world from their production of cocoanut oil. Very many sailors have at different times resided on shore--not an island of the group but has thus been thoroughly explored--and there are several who seem to have made their home there, particularly one respectable trader of

rapidly increasing wealth named Kandall.

On the 6th of January, 1844, the Columbia, Capt. Kelley, New London, was wrecked on Nonouti (Sydenham's Island). The ship's company were roughly treated, but all were taken off in safety twenty-three days after. January 8th, 1848, the Triton, Capt. Thomas Spencer, of New London, was very nearly taken by the natives of this same island under the leadership of a Portuguese. The Captain and a boat's crew were detained on shore under very aggravating circumstances, but the Portuguese having been killed in the attempt to take the vessel, their lives were spared and they effected their escape, with the consent of the natives, on the 19th of the same month, a very full and interesting account of which was published in the Friend of September and October, 1848. In 1850, the Flying Fox, Capt. Brown, was wrecked on the same obnoxious island. One of the mates, named Walker, with the cooper and eight white men of the ship's company, and a Rotuma native, made the passage to Simpson's Island. There they engaged in trade for cocoanut oil, but ere many months the cupidity and ire of the natives were roused and every one of the foreigners were killed, since which no white man has been allowed to reside among them.

The whaleship Ontario, Capt. Slocum, of New Bedford, was wrecked on Pitt's Island in January, 1852, but through the

influence of Capt. Randall, resident there, no lives were lost, and much even of the oil was saved. In August of the same year the same island was visited by the Protestant missionary company, then on their way westward to establish themselves on Kusaie and Ponapi.

In November, 1857, a mission station was taken on Apaiang, or Charlotte's Island, by Rev. H. Bingham, Jr., and a Hawaiian associate. In September, 1860, a second station was taken by two Hawaiians on the neighboring island of Tarawa. The language has been reduced to writing, and a number of children are fluent readers. But the desire for knowledge has yet to be awakened in the minds of the masses, and the missionary's heart longs for more definite evidence of an evangelical acceptance of a Savior by any one of that numerous people.

Nothing is more remarkable at the Gilbert Islands to one who has visited other parts of Micronesia than the great number of the people. Elsewhere the sparseness of the population is painful; but here the overflowing swarms are continually surprising one. The smallest of the atolls, Peru, whose diameter is not more than about two miles, has a population of from 1,500 to 2,000, and Aranuka has 1,000, while Tapiteuwea has from 7,000 to 8,000. In almost every other part of Micronesia the houses are scattered, and if there

are what may be termed villages, they are but small collections of houses and in no very close proximity to each other; while here the habit is to congregate in towns, where the houses are in nearly as close relation to each other as possible. These villages are--as is almost invariably the case on the low, annular islands--on the inner or lagoon shore; and as one lays at anchor within the collections of low, white-roofed houses stretching along under the cocoanut groves, may be seen every few miles, the canoe sheds first, in a row along the beach, and then the dwellings, which are nothing more than roofs, standing promiscuously just behind, usually with a large council-house in the midst.

On landing, the swarms of children, guiltless of clothing, are perfectly surprising to one who has mourned over the desolations on Ponapi and Kusaie. The numbers of old men and women also are among the most pleasant objects seen, even though we know that the old women are the drudges. So prolific are they as yet on the greater number of the islands--so uncontaminated with foreign disease--that their population is deliberately limited by practicing abortion to prevent too great a number of mouths--a reason denied by Mr. Hale. Their numbers are also shown by the sanguinary nature of their battles. The accounts given by Wilkes, on the authority of his informants, are doubtless correct.

Since the establishment of our mission on Apaiang a party of more than a thousand came over from Tarawa. Many were slain on the flats while attempting to land; others were taken alive and held as slaves; while hundreds fled in their proas and were never more heard of--their houses stand to this day empty along the northern shores of Tarawa.

By far the greater half of the population of Micronesia is congregated on this group. There may be twenty or twenty-five thousand on the whole of the Ladrone and Caroline Islands, which added to the ten thousand of the Marshall Islands make perhaps thirty-five thousand; while on the Gilbert Islands there are forty-five or fifty thousand. I give the numbers as I received them but a few weeks since from Capt. Randall, whose acquaintance with the group exceeds that of any one else.

Makin and Butaritari, (Pitt's Island)	2,000	
Marakei, (Mathew's Island)	2,000	
Apaiang, (Charlotte Island)	3,000	
Tarawa, (Knox, properly Knoy's Island	3,500	
Maiana, (Hall's Island)	4,000	
Kuria, (Woodle's Island)	1,500	
Aranuka, (Henderville's Island)	1,000	
Apamama, (Simpson's Island)	5,000	
Nonouti, (Sydenham's Island)	6,000	to 7,000
Taputeuwea, (Drummond's Island)	7,000	to 8,000
Peru, (Francis Island)	1,500	to 2,000
Nukunau, (Byron's Island)	5,000	to 6,000
Onoatoa, (Clerk's Island)	4,000	
Tamana, (Rotcher's Island)	3,000	
Arorai, (Hope Island)	2,000	to 2,500
	50,500	to 54,000

In physical appearance this people are darker and coarser as a whole than the more western inhabitants of Micronesia. They are also a larger race, some of the chiefish ones being very corpulent, equaling in size the ancient chiefs of Hawaii. This is all the more remarkable from these islands being the most barren of the atolls of Micronesia. The cocoanut and pandannus, and a few laboriously cultivated taro, are the only vegetable productions, while the greater number of the low islands of the Marshall and Caroline archipelagoes produce taro, breadfruit and jackfruit in considerable abundance. It is probable, however, that these remarks apply rather to the inhabitants of the islands to the north of the Equator, which is the portion that has fallen under my personal observation. Mr. Hale, of the United States exploring expedition, speaks of the natives of Taputeuwea as of "middle size, well made and slender..... The usual height is about five feet eight or nine inches, but we saw many who were considerably below this standard. There are none of those burly persons among them which are so common in the Sandwich and Society Islands, and we did not see one instance of obesity."

Nothing that I have seen would widely separate the Gilbert Islanders from the other Micronesian races. There is the same slightly acquiline nose and prominent cheek

bones and chin, and the same well developed cerebrum, particularly in the frontal and coronal regions. The hair has the same fine glossiness, and often curls. Yet it must be acknowledged that the Micronesian delicacy and perfection declines as we proceed southward in the group; and their language, both in its vocabulary and grammar, as was to be expected, has a greater affinity with those of Polynesia than any other Micronesian tongue.

In manners and customs the people exhibit something of the same coarseness betrayed in their physical developments. The males go naked, save when they hold or rudely tie a small mat about them with a piece of rope or rope yarn stolen or begged from some ship. The matured females wear a cocoanut leaf fringe about six inches wide. They are preeminently indelicate and indecent, possessing very little, if any, of that refined gentility found on Ponapi. Many of their customs regarding the dead are abominably filthy and disgusting, such as preserving them for days and weeks and carefully daubing over themselves the froth or ooze from the mouth of the deceased. A wife will frequently for weeks after the death of her husband continue to sleep beside the corpse under the same coverlid; and a mother will sometimes carry the body of her infant about with her till it falls to pieces, and then she will cleanse the bones and carry

them. Indeed, it is common to preserve the bones, particularly the skull, of the dead, and carry them about, at times carefully anointing them with oil, and even sharing food with them.

Heathenism is here seen in some of its lowest and most disgusting forms; though it may be said in alleviation that there is little of that deliberate cruelty and none of that religious sacrifice of life found in many of the groups of the Pacific. Their religious rites differ in no material respects from those already described in connection with other groups. Stones, the incarnations of deities, are found every where, some of which are so noted as to be the recipients of gifts of food and to receive the prayers of certain priestly ones.

On the greater number of the islands, particularly on those south of the equator, what government there is is of a very democratic nature. A man is of importance in proportion to the amount of land he possesses and the number of slaves he owns. Each head man is the representative of a family of brothers, sons, &c., who are more or less dependent upon him, and who are always ready to sustain him. The state is thus divided into large families, each jealous of the other and ready to thwart the ambitious pretensions of any one of their number. On some of the islands, however,

a particular family has by a series of fortunate events, either in peace or war, or in both, so extended its relations as to be paramount; and its patriarchal head is consequently the nominal king of the island. Yet there may be other families so powerful on these same islands as to prevent the establishment of a monarchy. The nearest like kingship is exercised on Apamama, including the two dependent islands of Kuria and Aranuka. On Apaiang a similar power is rapidly rising. On Maiana, Tarawa, Marakai and Butaritari there are nominal kings, but their power is far from absolute.

The explorers of the United States Exploring Expedition judged the inhabitants of the islands south of the equator to be less amiable and kindly dispositioned than those to the north; while Capt. Randall quite reverses the statement, and thinks the southern islanders much the cleverest and best natured. It is probable that the difference in the degree of government has something to do with the different judgments, and that the tendency to monarchism is greater in the more productive, and consequently more luxurious, islands of the northern portion.

The capacities of this race are developed in three principal directions; in the securing and preparation of food, the erection of houses, particularly of their noble

council houses, and in the construction of their proas and the navigation of them.

So limited are their resources that a very considerable degree of ingenuity is called forth in securing their food from land and sea, as on the Marshall Islands by far the most important article of dict is the pandanus fruit. This is eaten raw when ripe, and even when green; it is also cooked and eaten fresh; and is also prepared with great labor for long preservation. The cocoanut furnishes them with the meat and water of the nut at all stagesof its growth. From the meat of the nut thousands of barrels of oil are yearly manufactured by their own hands and sold to traders, who take the most of it to Sydney. The meat of each nut is scraped by hand and exposed to the sun for two or three days, when it is pressed under a long, rude lever acting on a transverse log. Agents for the traders are found on each island, who pay the natives principally in tobacco and firearms. The cocoanut tree also furnishes them from its flower stem with a delicious sap that forms a most nutritious and healthy drink, especially for the children, who frequently get little else of aliment for days together. This sap ferments and intoxicates, often producing untold mischief and misery. And from it also, by boiling, they prepare a delicious syrup, which they keep in cocoanut shells hung up, frequently by

hundreds, in their houses, and which they mix with water when their appetites or hospitality demands something especially delicate. But the cultivation of the taro makes the largest demands on their time, strength and ingenuity. First, trenches or patches are dug down through the sands and stones to the underlying reef-rock. The fresh water oozes into these ponds in sufficient quantities to nourish their coarse, large-leafed varieties of taro. But the next step is to secure soil for it to grow in. For this purpose it is brought in baskets from wherever found, sometimes from miles distant. Frequently the soil is first sifted to separate the worthless particles of stone. Even leaves of certain trees are carefully gathered and picked to pieces and then placed about the taro roots to assist in forming a little soil. An almost incalculable amount of labor is thus spent on each root, and yet it is only raised in sufficient quantities to be considered a luxury. Much of it is very coarse and impalatable, but there are most admirable varieties, and some grow in the course of years nearly to the size of a barrel.

In catching fish they are, as might be expected, remarkably expert, much of their sustenance coming from the sea. Probably that which I have seen on Ebon would be nothing strange of this people, by necessity so icthiophagous. A flying-fish was one day seen darting about over

the flats near our house, where the water was not more than a foot in depth. Two youth darted out like arrows and commenced throwing stones, that fell beyond the fish, and so frightened it still nearer the shore. After having for a time in this way worried and partially fatigued the fish, the chase commenced. The fish's constant effort was to regain the deep water, which his two pursuers as persistently defeated; for, strange to say, the poor fish seems not to be able to use its wing-like fins save in the fathomless main. In less than ten minutes the fish lay passive in the hands of these expert fisher-boys. I have seen a school of two or three hundred bonetas driven on shore and speared with such consummate skill that scarce an individual fish escaped.

Their council and dance houses loom up in the distance, the most prominent of all other objects on shore. Many of them are over a hundred feet long, nearly fifty feet wide and thirty to forty feet high. They are nothing more than immense roofs, reaching to within three feet of the ground, their eaves resting on large coral slabs. It is here they congregate on every public occasion, in tumultuous rabbles of delight or anger. Here every public measure is carefully discussed, and here they dance and revel sometimes for many continuous days and nights.

Their proas are as admirable as those of the Marshall islanders, the only important difference being that the keel is curved up fore-and-aft so as to form the segment of a circle. A canoe without its outrigger when looked at from one side is consequently the shape of a gibbous moon. At certain seasons they devote days to sailing miniature canoes, the bodies of which are only about eighteen inches long, and the sails nearly two fathoms in length, and whose speed is at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles an hour!

It may be gathered from such facts that they are an active, intelligent race, and that nothing in their intellectual parts need deter us from attempting their civilization. Their language, though of course destitute of innumerable terms for material objects they have never seen, is not found more deficient as a vehicle for moral truths than the mass of uncultivated dialects, and is probably more full in the necessary terms than many. In coming from the other portions of Micronesia here we detect a greater difference lingually than between any of the other dialects with which we are acquainted. In the first place there is a far less variety of vowel sounds; and the palatal consonants ch, j and sh, with the dental th and s so frequent in the north and western groups, are unknown here. It is this fact that admits of Hawaiian acquiring this

dialect so much more readily than any other of Micronesia. An article is found here elsewhere in Micronesia unknown. Yet in the use of suffixed or inseparable pronouns, which is the great peculiarity of the Micronesian dialects, this dialect is Micronesian.

THE ORIGIN AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MICRONESIANS

It seems by common consent to be admitted that the origin of this people was in Protonesia or Malaysia. The physical appearance of the people, no less than geographical relationship, points quite directly to the Philippine Islands. Le Gobien long since remarked of the color, features, language, customs and governments of the Caroline Islands that they resembled in many particulars those of the Tagalas of the Philippines. A careful comparison of the dialects now acquired by the different members of the Micronesian Mission with the Tagala, as given by Humboldt in his "Kawi-Sprache," would doubtless establish Le Gobien's remark beyond a doubt.

M. Lesson's supposition of a Mongolian origin need not be more than mentioned, for it has been satisfactorily met by the naturalists connected with the expedition under Lutke. There are doubtless occasional individuals with a Mongolian

cast of countenance, but isolated cases can never establish the theory.

So both D'Urville's and Lesson's supposition of a Negrito infusion from the islands to the south does not seem to me any more called for here than in the purest portions of Polynesia.

Some may feel the difficulty of supposing a migration eastward in the teeth of the North East Trade Winds. This is stated by Latham himself, who still traces the Micronesians to some part of Malaysia, and who also, with probability, derives the Polynesians from the great Malay area through Micronesia. These imagined obstructions are entirely removed on ascertaining that it is only during the summer months, when the sun is in southern declination, that the North East trades oscillate sufficiently southward to reach the Caroline Islands. During the remainder of the year, the southern limits of the northern trades are found to the north of this, and along the parallels of the Caroline Islands variables and westerly winds prevail. Again, in the trade wind zone a current usually sets with the wind, and just to the south of it a reverse current sets to the east, assisting the voyager to make his passage in that direction.

These facts, never before, that I am aware of, noticed, satisfactorily account for the long involuntary voyages made

by Micronesians both east and west through their extensive ranges. In the winter time they drift to the west when cast from their native Islands; in the summer they drift to the east.

Kotzebue reports finding natives of Wolea (Ulie, Swede's Island,) which is in the Caroline range to the south of Guam, on the Marshall Islands. And so also in 1857 the Rev. Messrs. Pierson and Doane found on the Marshall Islands another company of natives from the same island, who had thus made the involuntary voyage of 1500 miles, while attempting the voyage from Wolea to Seypan, to the north of Guam. Every few years the Ralik islanders drifted westward, and come ashore all along the Caroline range. Marshall islanders are drifted to the Gilbert Islands. The mother of one of the highest of the Ralik Islands chiefs is now supposed to be on Maiana of the Gilbert archipelago. And several times within a few years have Gilbert islanders drifted northward to the Marshall Islands, and also westward to the Caroline Islands.

No further effort need be made to prove the western origin of the Micronesians possible, so far as the "land and sea conditions" of Latham are concerned.

And it is perfectly legitimate to remark upon the entangled series of voluntary and involuntary migrations that have during ages been taking place throughout Micronesia,

that they in a considerable measure prevent the possibility of accurately tracing the sources of the inhabitants of the various islands; that is, of pointing out the course of primary migration from group to group of the Micronesian Islands, as Hale has accomplished it for Polynesia, and as he suggests it may be done in our territory.

I would also call attention to the thought that there is no need of denying an occasional arrival directly from some of the Mongolian areas, bringing more or less of Mongolian civilization. So late as 1836 there was at the weather, or Metalanim, harbor of Ponapi the figure-head of a vessel, which an intelligent Frenchman saw, who told me it seemed to him like the figure-head of a junk. It had belonged to a vessel that came ashore many years before, with a number of white men, the names of whom were given him by the natives.

Com. Wilkes gives a Gilbert Island tradition of a part of their ancesters having come from Banabe, which may have been Ponapi, and a part from Amoa, which was probably Samoa, or the Navigator's Islands. Capt. Randall has also given me the tradition of the chiefish family on Apamama, that fourteen generations ago their ancestors came from Tamoa. These show there has been something the same passing and repassing between Micronesia and Polynesia, that there has been between the different groups of these areas.

But this need not disturb Dr. Latham's extremely probable supposition that Polynesia was first peopled from Protonesia or Malaysia through Micronesia. There is nothing in the difference of races to prevent the theory, but much to confirm it, as will presently be more fully alluded to. Then the facts just given, showing the physical possibility, and complete certainty, of Micronesia itself having been peopled from the west, demonstrate with almost equal certainty that the Micronesian ranges must have been at least one of the avenues through which Polynesia, and primarily, Samoa (according to Hale) was peopled. And when we look upon the improbability of the Polynesians having passed eastward through New Guinea, the Solomon and New Hebrides Islands, (or the Melanesian Islands), because that they have left no traces of their passage through those magnificent archipelagoes, we are shut up to Micronesia as the channel through which the eastern Pacific received its ancestors. This last view is so ably maintained by Latham it need no further support. Should any however still persist in tracing the Polynesians through Melanesia, they cannot think of denying Micronesia to have been one of the lines of travel.

Concerning the points that distinguish the Micronesian from the Polynesian, much has been written at random, and of but little relevance.

We accept the division as a very convenient geographical expedient, for rendering the almost innumerable islands of the Pacific more manageable on our charts and in our treatises. It is also useful as an ethnological definition, as a subdivision of the extensive Malayo-Polynesian race. There are points of difference between the mass of the Micronesians and the Polynesians, but too much has been made of them; and to allow the use of the term to form in our minds the idea of a separate people, with few Polynesian affinities, is to be seriously deprecated. It is but one race that has drifted across the Pacific from Palao (Pelew) to Waiho (Easter Island).

The complexion of the Micronesians is a few shades lighter than that of the mass of the Polynesians, the nose is more straight and aquiline and less flattened, the countenance has greater vivacity, and their frames are more agile and delicate.

Of the character of the Micronesian it may in general be said, that he is less impressible, more mild and less savage and voluptuous, than the Polynesian; but what has been said of the Gilbert Islanders, shows this statement requires large limitation.

The arts of weaving and dyeing and navigation are somewhat peculiar to the Micronesian, particularly the first; and it is a sagacious remark of Mr. Hale, founded on the observations of Mr. Lesson, that the civilization of the Micronesians

seems to have descended from a higher grade which had been attained in some more favorable situation, while Polynesian civilization seems to have risen from a lower condition to their present state.

The system of clanship found in the Marshall and Caroline Islands, with all its attendant social and political complications, is something peculiar to Micronesia, and peculiar even to a portion of it; and this gives opportunity for the remark that the Gilbert islanders are certainly quite as much Polynesian as Micronesian, ethnologically. They are destitute of this system of clans; they have no knowledge of weaving; and they have much of that coarse indelicacy which is Polynesian.

M. D'Urville makes quite too much of the difference of languages between Polynesia and Micronesia. There is much of similarity in the grammatical structure of the languages. The principal characteristics of the Malayo-Polynesian languages, as given by Wm. Humboldt and found in Prichard's Researches, even to the dissyllablic radicals, are true of the Micronesian dialects. True, as we proceed westward there is a less close adherance to the law requiring each syllable to close with a vowel, and several un-Polynesian palatal sounds are heard; but these peculiarities are certainly not enough to require the hypothesis of a different race, especially when

there is an evident tendency, even in the harshest dialects, to a vowel at the end of syllables.

I do not appreciate the statements of almost every voyager, that the tabu system is unknown in Micronesia, and have been much puzzled to know what was meant. There may not be the same outrageous and idolatrous exercises of the tabuing power; but tabus innumerable exist. They relate to every imaginable relationship of life--to birth and death, to eating and sleeping, to talking and fighting, etc., etc. Much of this might by some be spoken of as mere national habit and custom; but there are tabus at certain times imposed, and again removed, at the will of the priestly and chiefish ones, who hold communication with the spiritual world; and the power of tabuing certain localities, certain houses and trees, is as much exercised in Micronesia. The idea of tabu, is, it seems to me, as complete in the Micronesian's mind as in that of any other of the Pacific islanders.

It has also been given as one of the pecularities of the Micronesians that they navigate by the stars, while Polynesians did not--a statement certainly requiring such large limitations as to lose its accuracy and force.

And again, it has been almost invariably given as a distinguishing characteristic of this people, that they eschew the use of the ava. Duperrey reported that though they had

the plant on Kusaie, they only used the leaves; while in truth no islanders ever made more use of the ava root than the inhabitants of Kusaie, Ponapi, and I think also Zuk (or Hogolen.)

Mr. Hale suggests that the little discs of shell that are used on almost all the islands, and that on some are strung together in such enormous quantities, are a kind of circulating medium, the idea of which is peculiar to Micronesia. I have lived many years among these islands and seen natives from every quarter, but never could see, though I knew of Mr. Hale's suggestion, that the idea of money was attached. They are highly valued as ornaments, and, like everything else, are used in barter.

The Polynesian. 1860--1861
Vol. XVII. No. 36
"The Gilbert Islands."